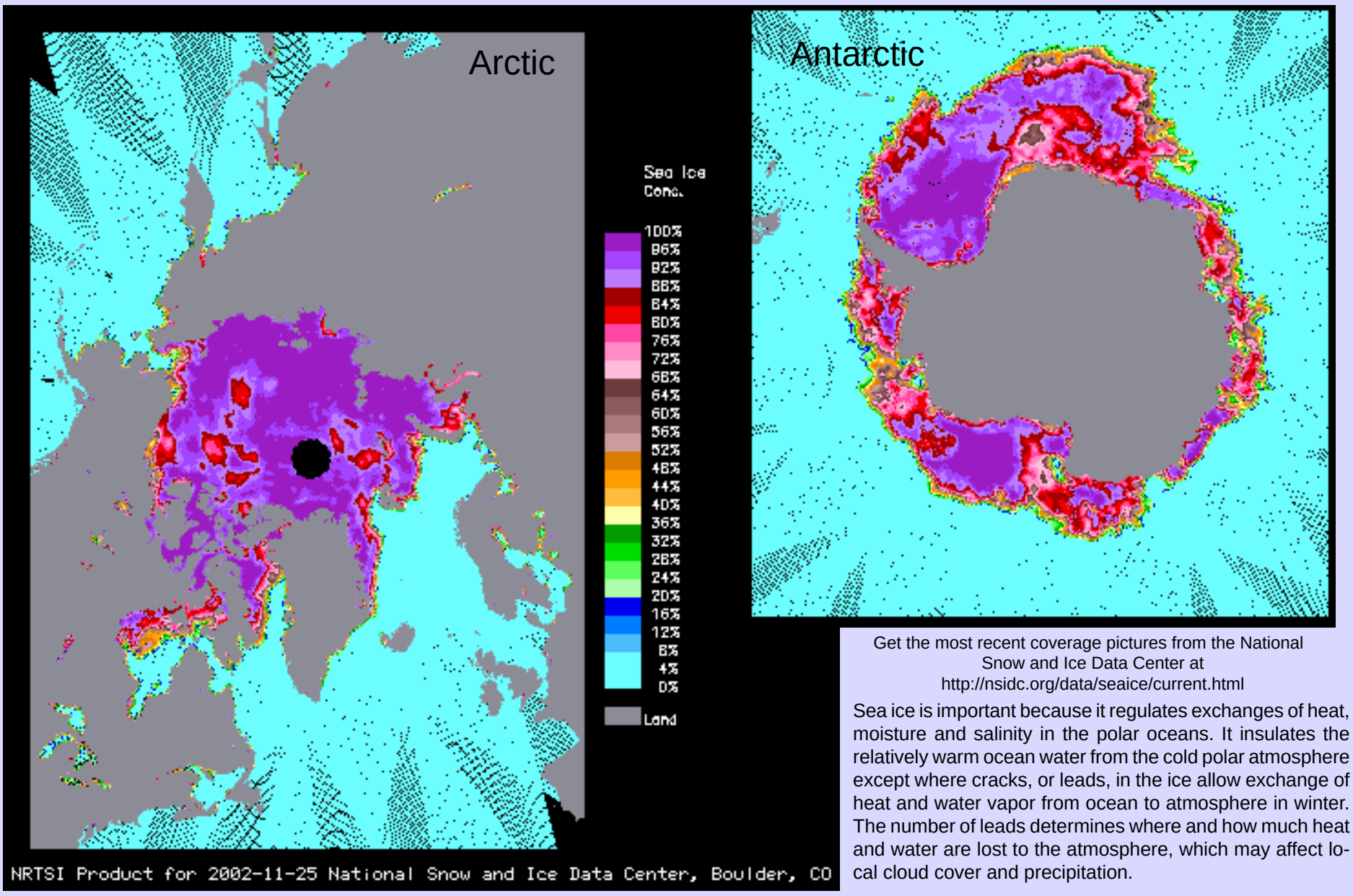
United States Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service

National Geophysical Data Center (NGDC)

Where can you Sea Ice?



Get the most recent coverage pictures from the National Snow and Ice Data Center at http://nsidc.org/data/seaice/current.html

Sea ice is important because it regulates exchanges of heat, moisture and salinity in the polar oceans. It insulates the relatively warm ocean water from the cold polar atmosphere except where cracks, or leads, in the ice allow exchange of heat and water vapor from ocean to atmosphere in winter. The number of leads determines where and how much heat and water are lost to the atmosphere, which may affect local cloud cover and precipitation.

The seasonal sea ice cycle affects both human activities and biological habitats. For example, companies shipping raw materials such as oil or coal out of the Arctic must work quickly during periods of low ice concentration, navigating their ships towards openings in the ice and away from treacherous multi-year sea ice. Many arctic mammals, such as polar bears, seals and walruses, depend almost entirely upon the sea ice for their habitat. These species hunt, feed and breed on the ice. Should the sea ice recede excessively, scientists worry that increased nutritional stresses on the limited food chain may adversely affect these populations, particularly polar bears who must store large amounts of fat to survive arctic winters.

December 2002

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

November

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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January

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Underlying scientific data viewable at: **http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/ngdc.html**